

# Frequently Asked Questions About Safe Eating of Fish

## **Are all fish safe to eat?**

No. Some fish have toxic chemicals such as mercury in them because of chemicals in the water where they swim. Nursing mothers and women who are or may become pregnant should not eat fish high in mercury.

High mercury fish include swordfish, tuna steaks, shark, king mackerel, and golden and white snapper.

## **Are there any guidelines for safe eating of fish?**

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the EPA have issued recommendations to the following individuals: Women Who Might Become Pregnant, Women Who are Pregnant, Nursing Mothers, and Young Children.

1. Do not eat Shark, Swordfish, King Mackerel, or Tilefish because they contain high levels of mercury.
2. Eat up to 12 ounces (2 average meals) a week of a variety of fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury.
3. Five of the most commonly eaten fish that are low in mercury are shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, pollock, and catfish.
4. Another commonly eaten fish, albacore ("white") tuna has more mercury than canned light tuna. So, when choosing your two meals of fish and shellfish, you may eat up to 6 ounces (one average meal) of albacore tuna per week.
5. Check local advisories about the safety of fish caught by family and friends in your local lakes, rivers, and coastal areas. If no advice is available, eat up to 6 ounces (one average meal) per week of fish you catch from local waters, but don't consume any other fish during that week.

Follow these same recommendations when feeding fish and shellfish to your young child, but serve smaller portions.

## **What is mercury and how does it get into fish?**

Mercury is a part of our natural world. It can also come from mining, burning trash, and burning coal. It can settle into lakes and rivers and, over time, fish build up mercury in their bodies. All fish contain some mercury but large fish and older fish have the most mercury in them. Mercury cannot be removed by cooking the fish.

## **How does mercury affect my health and the health of my children?**

Mercury can damage many parts of the body, including the nervous system, the lungs, the kidneys, vision, and hearing. The seriousness of the risk depends upon how much mercury a person is exposed to. Babies who are exposed to mercury while in the womb can suffer severe damage to the nervous system and may die. They may have brain damage, learning disabilities and hearing loss.

## **Should I still breastfeed my baby if I eat fish that contains mercury?**

YES! Breastfeeding gives your baby health benefits that will last a lifetime. The benefits of breastfeeding far outweigh the risks of eating fish with mercury in it.